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SECURITY INFORMATION

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

25 February 1952

SUBJECT: SE-22: CONSEQUENCES OF CERTAIN POSSIBLE US COURSES OF ACTION WITH RESPECT TO INDOCHINA, BURMA, OR THAILAND.

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the consequences of certain possible US courses of action with respect to an identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention* in Indochina, Burma, or Thailand.

ASSUMPTION

The United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand will join the United States in warning Communist China that the five powers will meet Communist military intervention in Southeast Asia with military counteraction against Communist China.

* The term "identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention" is intended to cover either an open and acknowledged military intervention or an unacknowledged military intervention of such a scale and nature that its existence could be demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt.

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ESTIMATE

I. THE EFFECT OF A JOINT WARNING

On Communist Intentions

1. We estimate that the Chinese Communists do not now intend to launch an "identifiable military intervention" in Southeast Asia. We do not believe that a joint warning against such an intervention would tend to provoke it. Consequently, such a warning would probably have no specific effect upon present Chinese Communist intentions.

2. If, contrary to our estimate, the Chinese Communists do now contemplate an "identifiable military intervention" in Southeast Asia, or if in the future they should contemplate such an intervention, a joint warning by the five powers would tend to deter them. The Chinese Communists no doubt appreciate already that "identifiable military intervention" in Southeast Asia would entail substantial risk of joint military counteraction, an unnecessary risk in view of their current progress and prospects by means short of such intervention. They may, however, discount this risk in view of known or supposed differences in policy among the five powers and of possible doubt whether prompt and effective military counteraction is within their capabilities. To resort to "identifiable military intervention"

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in the face of a joint warning by the five powers would require deliberate acceptance of a virtual certainty of military counteraction the probable consequences of which would be general war in the Far East, if not global war. So far both Communist China and the USSR have shown a desire to localize the hostilities in Korea, Indochina, Burma, and Malaya. It is improbable that they would initiate an "identifiable military intervention" in Indochina, Burma, or Thailand in the face of a joint warning by the five powers unless, on the basis of global considerations, they intended thereby to precipitate global war or at least general war in the Far East. We do not believe that they now have any such intention.

3. The effectiveness of a joint warning as a deterrent, however, would depend in large measure on Communist conviction that:

- a. The five powers were not bluffing, but really meant it and were united among themselves as to the military counteraction to be taken.
- b. The five powers were actually capable of prompt and effective military counteraction.
- c. The counteraction would be directed against China proper as well as toward repelling the Chinese Communist intervention.

4. It is unlikely that an effort to obtain additional signatories would make a joint warning any more effective as a deterrent. India, whose adherence might have a profound effect on Communist China, would almost

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certainly refuse to participate. The Communists would discount the adherence of the Philippines, Thailand, and Japan, because of their military weakness and existing ties with the West. (Actually it is improbable that Japan would wish to take such a provocative step at this time and uncertain whether Thailand would wish to do so.) Few, if any, non-Oriental governments would be willing to join in a formal warning, and their adherence would probably be subject to similar Communist discounting. The Communists would assume Chinese Nationalist support of the warning, whether or not explicitly expressed.

Other Effects

5. A joint warning -- if made publicly -- would considerably increase the morale of the Thai and Vietnamese governments and might slightly increase the will of the Vietnamese people to continue resistance to the Viet Minh. In Burma any encouragement derived from the warning would probably be offset by doubt of the effectiveness of Western military counteraction, fear of involvement in a conflict between the great powers, and general suspicion of Western "imperialist" motives.

6. Elsewhere in East and South Asia the effect would be mixed. There would be some tendency, notably in Japan and the Philippines, and to some extent even in India, to applaud this new manifestation of

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of Western determination to check Communist aggression. On the other hand, the feeling would be widely expressed, especially in India and Indonesia, that the warning represented another instance of Western meddling in Asian affairs and another indication of Western willingness to sacrifice the lives of millions of Asians in pursuit of colonialist objectives. This reaction might have a serious effect on popular and governmental attitudes if use of strategic atomic weapons was threatened in the warning.

7. The effect of a warning on non-Asian powers would probably not be of major importance. A warning might well revive the fears in the smaller NATO powers regarding the dangers of general war or of an over-extension of Western strength in the Far East, but the basic attitudes of these countries would not thereby be changed.

II. POSITION OF THE UN IN THE EVENT OF IDENTIFIABLE COMMUNIST MILITARY INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA, BURMA, OR THAILAND

8. If identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention in Southeast Asia actually took place, the UN could probably be led to adopt countermeasures similar to those taken regarding Korea. Action by the Security Council would certainly be blocked by a Soviet veto, but the matter could then be taken to the General Assembly within twenty-four hours under the "Uniting for Peace" resolution. The General Assembly would probably begin by calling for a cease-fire.

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Were this action to be ignored (as it presumably would be), a two-thirds majority could probably be mustered for resolutions condemning Communist China as an aggressor, recommending military counter-action to repel the aggression, and setting up a unified military command (though not necessarily under the US) to that end. Most UN members, however, because of their fears of a general war, would probably not be willing to give specific authorization for retaliatory military action against Communist China itself. As a result, the resolution on countermeasures would presumably have to be phrased in general terms leaving to implication the authority of the unified UN command to adopt the military measures it deemed necessary. It is even possible that, at least initially, the UN would limit counter-action to the area in which the Chinese Communist intervention was taking place. There would certainly be widespread aversion to use of atomic bombs or large numbers of conventional bombs against Chinese population centers.

9. The willingness of the UN to adopt a stand against Communist intervention in Southeast Asia would be contingent on the readiness of the victim to appeal to the UN. Although Indochina and Thailand would almost certainly be prompt in seeking UN assistance against Chinese Communist military intervention, there is some danger that Burma might fail to make a timely appeal, particularly against a disguised intervention or one purportedly confined to eliminating the Chinese Nationalist troops in Northern Burma.

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10. The degree of UN support for action against Chinese Communist aggression would hinge on various other factors. There would probably be a large number of Arab and Asian abstentions if the victim were Indochina, which is regarded as a French puppet, but the Arab-Asian reaction might be far more favorable than in the Korean case if the victim were Burma, which has followed a policy of non-involvement. Support of UN action would be weakened if a drastic East-West split, threatening the basis of the UN and possibly even general war, appeared to be developing. Obviously, much would depend on the ease with which the aggressive character of the Chinese Communist military intervention could be demonstrated. If the five powers proceeded to take countermeasures in the absence of prompt and effective UN action, world support of their actions would be considerably lessened. However, some advocates of a strong line against aggression, such as the Turks, might still wish to contribute.

III. PROBABLE EFFECTS OF THE ACTUAL EXECUTION OF JOINT COUNTERMEASURES

Reaction of the Chinese Communist and Soviet Governments

11. Chinese Communist and Soviet official reactions to Western military countermeasures would be along the general lines discussed in SE-20. Communist planning unquestionably would have taken into

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account the likelihood of Western military counteraction whether or not the actual execution of retaliatory military action followed upon a deliberately disregarded warning. Although the Peiping reaction to Western retaliation would largely depend upon the scale and nature of the retaliatory measures, it is not expected that the Communists would call off their attack. Rather, the Chinese Communists probably would stepup their military aggression. They would redeploy their interceptor aircraft from present concentrations around Korea to provide the maximum air defense; existing AAA defenses would be brought to bear against attacking aircraft; and the Chinese Communist Air Force would probably attempt to strike against UN bases and fleet units.

12. The degree of Soviet military aid to China would depend upon (a) the nature, scope, and degree of success of the Western counter-action, and (b) the degree to which the existence of the Peiping regime seemed to be jeopardized. In any event, the USSR would almost certainly stepup the supply of all types of air materiel, including additional aircraft, to the Chinese Communists. They probably would commit their own air defense elements in the form of "volunteers". In general, Moscow would avoid a commitment of its own forces to such an extent that global war would almost certainly result. However, if Peiping's control in North China and Manchuria should be threatened, Moscow would take any action it deemed necessary to assure the retention of Communist

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control in these areas, regardless of the consequent risk of global war. Presumably the initial Communist action would only have been made with full realization of the risks involved.

Psychological and political effect within Communist China

13. Counteraction limited to naval blockade and the conventional bombing of selected targets would probably have comparatively little psychological and political effect in China, except possibly in the areas immediately affected, where unrest and dissatisfaction with the regime might increase. A general air offensive, including the use of atomic weapons, might lead to some loss of support for Peiping's policies in the cities. An air offensive unaccompanied by invasion or organized rebellion, however, would provide no focus for popular dissatisfaction with the regime. On the contrary, Western air action against the Chinese mainland would be utilized by the Communists as "proof" of western aggressive intentions, and might serve to create a unity among some segments of the Chinese population that would more than offset the dissatisfaction with the regime's policies that it would create in other segments of the population.

Reactions in Indochina, Burma, and Thailand

14. In general, the reaction in Indochina, Burma, and Thailand to the actual Chinese Communist military intervention in any of those

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countries and to Western military countermeasures would be one of dismay at the prospect of suffering either Chinese Communist conquest or devastation like that in Korea rather than one of confidence in Western protection. In the final analysis, the conduct of these peoples and governments would depend upon their current estimate of the probable outcome of the conflict between the Western powers and Communist China and of the havoc that might be wrought locally meanwhile.

15. If the joint military counteraction by the five powers were limited to repelling the Chinese Communist aggression in the area where it had occurred reactions in the three countries would probably be as follows:

- a. Indochina. In the event of Communist intervention in Burma or Thailand, the Vietnamese would react favorably to counteraction at the point of attack, assuming that such measures involved use of Western ground troops. If an attack were launched against Indochina, approval of countermeasures would be contingent upon evidence of effective support; effectiveness would probably be judged chiefly in relation to the number of ground forces dispatched to supplement Franco-Vietnamese troops.

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Political commitments regarding Vietnam's status would also affect the receptivity to Western military action in that country.

b. Burma. It is certain that Burmese anxieties would be greatly intensified in case of clear aggression in any of the three countries. An attack on Indochina would arouse conflicting reactions: a general tendency to favor the Viet Minh as a nationalist movement would be shaken somewhat by projection of the image of similar Chinese assistance to Burmese insurgents, but relief Burma had not been invaded might perpetuate present apathy despite the continuing threat. In the initial stages of such an attack on Burma itself, it is likely that fear of war on home ground would delay or jeopardize recognition of a clear threat, resulting in equivocation and delay which would further restrict the effectiveness of Burmese resistance and of joint counter-efforts in Burma.

c. Thailand. While approving of counteraction against an attack on any of the three countries, Thai responses and efforts would be conditioned chiefly by desire to

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improve the capacity for self-defense. Prompt assurance of direct assistance would probably be sought in any crisis period.

16. If military counteraction by the five powers included naval blockade and the conventional bombing of selective targets in Communist China, reaction in any of three countries attacked would probably be generally favorable, provided blockade and bombardment were added to, rather than substituted for, effective countermeasures at the point of attack. In Burma, it is possible that a counter-action limited to attacks on China might be most favorably received, based on the desire to prevent widespread fighting on Burmese soil and perhaps on a belief that such attacks on the mainland of China would effectively contain or deter Chinese intervention in Burma.

17. If military counteraction by the five powers included a general air offensive against Communist China including the use of atomic weapons, the widespread revulsion of feeling concerning use of atomic weapons, which are viewed essentially as instruments of mass-destruction, would probably be so strong that, even under actual attack, the three nations would condemn such a program.

Reactions of other Asian nations

18. Sentiment in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines would generally support from the outset vigorous military countermeasures

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against Communist China. Japanese support would come in question chiefly if operations were to be conducted from Japanese bases, in which case, although the Government could not stop such operations, popular apprehensions over the possible invocation of the Sino-Soviet pact might weaken the Government's position and limit popular support pending evidence of the effectiveness of the operations. In Indonesia and India there would probably be passive acceptance of local military counteraction to repel the Chinese Communist aggression if the fact of the aggression were established beyond cavil, although there would be some tendency to regard the war as a conflict of rival aggressive imperialisms. The Indian attitude would be materially affected by whether the object of Chinese Communist aggression were Indochina or Burma, with more active Indian concern and support in the latter case. At least initially India and Indonesia would be opposed to military counteraction against China proper, although they might come to support it if it became apparent that such action would contribute to their own security. The Asian reaction would be considerably more favorable if the military counteraction were conducted under UN sanction with Asian participation. No Asian country would be likely to approve of the strategic use of atomic weapons.

Reactions to the employment of Chinese Nationalist forces

19. A Nationalist invasion of the mainland would be received with little popular enthusiasm. Whatever the state of disaffection toward

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the Chinese Communist regime the general expectation would be that the arrival of Nationalist forces could only bring further suffering and devastation in the course of futile or inconclusive operations. This apprehension could be overcome only if it appeared that the Nationalists were strong enough to win a quick and decisive victory, at least locally, and to hold the area securely thereafter. In the light of Civil War experience, this result would not be expected unless the invasion were primarily Western, with the Nationalists in an auxiliary role. In the light of Korean operations, it would be generally doubted even so. In any case, the Nationalists would not be welcome unless it was also believed that the Nationalist regime had been thoroughly reformed since it last operated on the mainland. In present circumstances a Nationalist return to the mainland could only be regarded with dismay, even by those Chinese who are disaffected toward the Communist regime, excepting only those few who, for one reason or another, are now outlawed.

20. The other nations of East and South Asia would probably not oppose the use of Chinese Nationalist forces if the counteraction were clearly presented as a case of repelling aggression and the impression avoided that the war was being used to facilitate the restoration of the Nationalist Government, with which most Asians have little sympathy. For this reason, reactions would be less favorable if Nationalist troops

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were used against China proper than if they were deployed with other forces in defense of Southeast Asia, although within Southeast Asia reception of them would not in general be enthusiastic. It is unlikely that India or Indonesia would oppose their use if, as the war developed, exigencies of manpower seemed to require the step -- as long as the Nationalists were not used as a political weapon to restore Chiang's position on the mainland. The Philippines, South Korea and Thailand would in general support the use of Nationalist troops, as would probably a majority of the people in the Chinese overseas communities in Southeast Asia.

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